

April 27, 1945

Fletchie Dearest,

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Day before yesterday they had an official funeral for the massacre victims. It was a terrific spectacle. There was a guard of honor of American soldiers. Hundreds of Russian, Pole, French & Serb slave laborers from the region were there, as well as hundreds of the German civilians. The cemetery looked nice with the even rows of white crosses and the graves covered with flowers.

The General gave a talk first, which was translated to German. The gist of this was that although the immediate blame had been placed on the SS and the Nazi party, the enormity of the crime, the onus and the reparation, fall at the feet of the German people in general and the citizens of Gardelegen in particular. Following short services by a Catholic priest, a Protestant chaplain, and a Jewish chaplain, each in turn translated, a Russian flag detail, with bright, red sashes, carried in and placed the Russian flag. Then the Polish, and French flags, and so on. The Pole was an officer, who broke down completely, and left, weeping uncontrollably. Finally came an end with the volleyed salutes of the rifles and the clear notes of the bugler's taps left everyone just about unstrung. It was a tremendously stirring and colorful ceremony, filled with emotional tension and pathos. People cried openly and unashamedly.

The reaction of the Germans was varied. Most were silently ashamed. I saw one family placing flowers on a grave, all of them crying. But also I saw two Hitler Jugend, who were stonily watering another grave, which was their detail, and as we passed one could hear them muttering under their breath - "The Jewish Swine."

And so ends the immediate events related to the massacre of Gardelegen. Its implications and significance must remain a fearful reminder to us all as the long struggle against this fanatical, ruthless, power-mad people continues. I think this experience has affected me more than any of the other atrocious inhumanities that I have seen. It has left me sick at heart.

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